Contraceptive Prevalence

Estimates of contraceptive prevalence among married women aged 15–49 from four KAP surveys appear in Table 1, along with the rates from the 1976–1977 Iran Fertility Survey.\(^6\) By 1992, a far greater proportion of married women of reproductive age were practicing contraception than were doing so at the peak of program activity during the 1970s (65% vs. 37%). While contraceptive use has increased each year, its growth slowed after 1994.

Table 1 also shows a persistent difference in contraceptive use between urban and rural areas, although it had been substantially reduced in recent years: In 1976, only 20% of rural women practiced contraception, compared with 54% of urban women; by 1992, 52% of rural women and 74% of urban women were using contraceptives, and by 1997, 66% of rural women and 77% of urban women were doing so. This represents a remarkable shift in rural communities, because prior experience with contraceptive methods, including traditional ones, had once been extremely limited.

Traditional contraceptive methods have been used for a long time in Iran, the most popular being withdrawal. In 1992, traditional methods accounted for about one-third of urban contraceptive use and approximately one-fifth of rural contraceptive use. In both rural and urban areas, there was a slight decrease in the use of traditional contraceptives between 1992 and 1997.

**Modern Method Mix**

In 1992, the pill was the modern contraceptive method most frequently used by all married women who were practicing contraception (Table 2). About 43% of modern contraceptive users in urban areas and 64% of rural users reported that they relied upon the pill. This method was followed by the IUD in urban areas (21%) and tubectomy in rural communities (18%). Condoms accounted for 17% of modern contraceptive use reported by urban women and 10% of use reported by rural women.

There was a shift away from the pill and condoms between 1992 and 1997: Pill use declined by approximately nine percentage points among urban women and by 19 percentage points among rural women. There was a corresponding increase in the proportion of women selecting tubectomy, use of which grew by 11 percentage points in both urban and rural areas. Reliance on vasectomy almost doubled between 1992 and 1997, but this method still accounted for only 2–4% of modern contraceptive use. The hormonal implant and injectables have recently been added to the mix of contraceptives available from the program. A greater proportion of rural women than urban women used an injectable contraceptive (10% vs. 3%), while reliance on the hormonal implant was limited among all women.

**Sources of Contraceptive Supplies**

A favorable environment for private-sector supply of contraceptives emerged when the family planning program was revitalized. Data from the 1992 KAP survey showed that 57% of modern contraceptives were supplied through public hospitals, health centers, health houses and pharmacies. The remainder were supplied by the private sector. Data from the 1997 survey indicate that 28% of modern contraceptive users reported the private sector as their source. In 1997, 37% of the pill supplies and 30% of IUDs were obtained through the private sector. There are indications that the government would like to increase the private sector’s role in the supply of contraceptives. Yet, more data are needed to examine this issue and to determine how access through the private sector can be expanded.

**Use of Permanent Methods**

Reliance on vasectomy and tubectomy is increasing in Iran, particularly in provinces that are considered religiously conservative, such as Isfahan and Yazd. In 1996, the average age of women who elected to have a tubectomy was 33 in urban areas and 34 in rural areas; the average age of all women whose husbands had a vasectomy was 32. Most of the couples who chose to use a permanent method had been married at least 10 years and were at a high parity. It appears that women who have had a tubectomy are more likely to have a limited education, compared with women whose husbands have had a vasectomy. About 60% of women in Isfahan who have had a tubectomy were illiterate. On the other hand, about 33% of women whose husband had had a vasectomy were illiterate. However, both groups averaged 5.4 living children, and more than 50% of women who had had a tubectomy had more than five living children.

**Quality of Service Delivery**

The reports available from the KAP surveys do not allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the quality of service delivery within Iran’s family planning program. However, answers to some of the questions from the most recent surveys can be viewed as rough measures of quality.